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### CHALLENGES FACED AT WORKPLACE: A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS

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#### ABSTRACT

The domestic workers as a part of unorganized work force remain the most exploited. In Indian context, this informal workforce is working at lower wages, adverse working conditions and without any of social security benefits. The study covers themes such as basic demographic features, nature of services, job profile of the domestic workers, access to social security and challenges faced at work place. This paper, exploring primary data collected from women domestic workers in Thane. Findings of the study suggest the need to create a comprehensive social security system for domestic workers in India and it is necessary to look into the challenges faced by them. There is need for capacity building amongst women doing domestic work through education, skill and taking care of health issues for better utilization of human resource for overall empowerment of women and growth and development of the country.

**Keywords:** Women domestic workers, Human resource and Social security.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

In India women constitute nearly half of the total population and they play a vital role in domestic sphere in the rural field and also in urban economy. Yet their economic status is still low as reflected by the census data itself that present distorted picture of women particularly of those who are engaged in the informal sector of urban economy (Tripathy 1991). They are engaged household tasks, which includes washing utensils, floor cleaning, washing of clothes working as well as same outdoor tasks such as purchase of vegetables etc. Most of them live in slums and lead a monotonous life.

Reports` from National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), census and National Family Health Survey etc suggest that female work participation rate is much lower than male work participation rates, but in some occupations female far exceeds male. For instance, the occupational category „domestic work“. It is a universally observed that in a society which is characterized by gender segregation and social stratification, certain sections unfortunately occupy a subordinate position. The domestic workers as a part of unorganized (and marginalized) work force remain the most neglected and exploited.

Majority of women are engaged in the unorganised sectors such as agriculture, cotton and tea plucking, pottery, handloom, construction and domestic services..As far as Indian scenario is concerned, we find through the statistics that women workers constitute only one third of the total workforce in India where as in case of domestic workers, women are around 90 %. There

are many evidences to indicate that over a period of time domestic work has become more “feminized”. These women are often considered as cheap labor. The non-availability of job in rural or tribal areas facilitates continuous supply of women workers to urban areas.

Women's unpaid production activities at home such as cooking, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, caring children and old aged etc, is substituted by paid economic activity. This makes domestic work as a pivotal occupation in determining the linkage between family and the dynamics of open economy. In Indian context, this informal workforce are working at lower wages, adverse working conditions and without any of social security benefits. Reflecting on indecent working and living condition of women domestic workers, National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS, 2007, p. 86) views: “Working in the unregulated domain of a private home, mostly without the protection of national labour legislation, allows for female domestic workers to be maltreated by their employers with impunity. Women are often subjected to long working hours and excessively arduous tasks. They may be strictly confined to their places of work. The domestic workforce is excluded from labour laws that look after important employment-related issues such as conditions of work, wages, social security, provident funds, old age pensions, and maternity leave.” It is necessary to look into the challenges faced by the domestic workers.

Data from National Sample Survey 61st Round (2004-2005) reveals that:

- More than 70% of domestic workers are based in urban sector. Approximately 90% of these workers are women. 40% are in the age group of „15-34“. 47% of them are currently married, while 30% of them are widowed/divorced/ separated.
- 80% of them follow Hinduism, while 10% are Muslims. Approximately 40% of them are from socially disadvantaged categories like schedule caste (SC) and schedule tribe (ST), while one third are from other backward class (OBC).
- Around 60% of them are illiterates, while just 2% have studied up to secondary level.
- In case of basic features of employment of women domestic workers in India, almost all domestic workers are not entitled to any form social security benefits. Although, 84% of them get regular monthly salary, 88% of them are not entitled to provisions like paid leave. Almost all of them work without any written job contract.

At this backdrop, the current study has been undertaken to analyze the challenges faced at workplace by female domestic workers in urban India, with special reference to Thane, Mumbai. The study covers basic demographic features, job profile of the domestic workers, access to social security and challenges faced at work place and home.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The core objective of this survey was to

- i. Study demographic and socio-economic profile of domestic worker.

ii. Understand the nature of work, access to social security and challenges faced at work place and at home.

### 3. METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Primary data was collected by interviewing randomly 100 domestic workers have in Thane city, central Suburb of Mumbai. The research design is exploratory one. An unstructured and open ended questionnaire schedule of enquiry was used to get first hand information on personal experience of domestic workers. The findings were segmented on different categories to get a broad nature of work profile of domestic workers.

### 4. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

#### 4.1 Background Characteristics of Domestic Workers

Table-1 shows distribution of domestic workers with respect to age interval. About 39% of respondents belong to age interval „18-34“, while close to half of the respondents(48%) are in the age group of “35-59”. Very few i.e. 7% of respondents are above 60 years of age and only 2% of respondents are below 18 years age.

There happens to be only 38% of workers who are literate.(20% studied upto primary level, 8% upto middle school,5% upto secondary and 2% up to HSC. A miniscule 3% have developed skills like Mehendi and rangoli.

15% of the respondents are unmarried and 65% are found to be married. Around 20% respondents are happened to be either widow or divorced/separated. 18% of the respondents are from nuclear family and 75% are from joint family.7% did not responded to this query.

75% of respondents are having a family size of more than 8 persons,15% of them having the family size of 4 to 8 persons and 8% are having family size of 0 to 4. 54% of the domestic workers are having 2 to 4 children.28 % are having 4 to 6 children.12% of them are having 2 or less than 2 offspring. Around 6% are having more than 6 offspring.

As observed Hindus (53%) and Muslim (30%) constitute four-fifth of the sample. Among others neo buddhist constitute 9% of data. Most of them belong to OBC category followed by SC 9% and ST 8%.While 26% belong to upper cast category 39% refused to divulge their identity.

#### 4.2 Reasons for migration

The study indicates the migration pattern of domestic workers. As observed, 58 % of domestic workers were born in the urban areas. 40% are from rural background.42% of domestic workers are original inhabitant of Thane whereas 43% are migrated.15% of respondent did not reply to this query. The main reason of migration being search for better opportunities(28%).Marriage being the reason of migration for 23% of respondents.20% of respondents are forced migrants due to poverty. Most of the domestic workers (61%)are staying in thane for more than 20 years. Around 16% are staying for 10 to 20 years and 12% of them are in thane for less than 10 years.

### 4.3 Employment characteristics

Table 2 shows the employment scenario or profile of domestic workers. It indicates that around 90% of domestic workers go to 2 to 4 household to take domestic work assignment and in an average a worker goes to 3 household each day. Most of the household job include utensil/floor clearing and cloth washing. It is followed by cooking assignment. A miniscule percentage of workers are engaged in activities like child care and care of aged. The working hour of domestic worker shows a large variation having different slab. The slab of 2-4 hours, 4-6 hours and 6-8 hours are generally performed work assignment. Very few workers work either more than 8 hours or less than 2 hours. The average income level of domestic workers vary from 2000-4000 rupees (Average being 3270 rupees). Very few are fortunate to earn more than 4000 rupees per month and however miniscule it may be a portion of workers cannot even earn 1000 rupees per month. In an average a domestic workers earning is Rs.20/- per hour.

### 4.4 Challenges Faced at Workplace by Domestic Workers

Going through the table-3 the following observations were made.

- a. Eighty percent of the women are not satisfied with their present salary and expect more (at least 25% hike in the present remuneration).
- b. A small portion (13%) of women expressed their grievances for doing extra work when guest come. And majority them says that they do not get any compensation for the extra work.
- c. One fifth of women have lost their job for their absence in work because of illness.
- d. They want at least one holiday per week. But 90% of the employers are not in favour of this demand as expressed by respondents.
- e. 5. Two third of domestic workers get some type of food by the employer. And majority of employer have confidence and faith on their workers. Only 3% of respondents are being subjected to suspicion of theft by their employer.
- f. Majority of respondents agree that harassment of any form (mental/physical/sexual) is very low but cannot be totally ruled out.
- g. 7. The job of domestic worker is purely based on mutual understanding without having any written contract and having zero job security.
- h. There are few women who are satisfied with their present job. They praised their employer being friendly, cordial, helping them by providing breakfast, tea, clothes, medicine and valuable suggestions.

### 4.5 Problems at Home

The study indicated a common background of all the domestic women workers as far as their household problems. Most of them suffer from acute poverty and majority of them are having drunkard husband. Their adolescent daughters suffer from unpleasant behavior at home. Some of

them (the women) are subjected to domestic violence. They somehow try to neutralize this stressful life by watching TV and other cheap entertainment (like playing cards etc).

It is further observed that most of the women after returning back to their home repeat the same work as there is no helping hand to reduce their burden of work. However a few respondents reported that their daughter –in –laws or mother help them doing household work.

Because of economic condition they prefer government or municipality hospital for getting treatment. However some of them prefer to consult private practitioners in order to save time. At that point their expenditure increases with deterioration of health.

Getting minimum need like safe drinking water or a minimum education to their children is a big problem for them. They are unaware of minimum wage act and totally blind about future security like insurance, disability benefits, medical benefits etc.

### **Inferences**

Domestic workers form one of the largest sectors of female employment in the urban areas. Domestic workers are unorganized and the sector remains unregulated and unprotected by labour laws. This is largely because they undertake work in private homes rather than in commercial establishments. These workers come from vulnerable communities and backward areas. Most of these are poor, vulnerable, illiterate, unskilled and do not understand the urban labour market. Domestic work is undervalued and poorly regulated and many domestic workers remain overworked, underpaid and unprotected. They are maltreated, exploited, suffered with violence and even sexually abused. The main issue that concern domestic worker are lack of decent wages & working conditions, no defined work time, no weekly offs, loneliness, violence, abuse & sexual harassment at workplace, victimization at the hand of traffickers / placement agencies, forced migration, lack of welfare measures such as health insurance, maternity protection, old age security and lack of skills development resulting in stagnation and no career growth.

Mothers who are working as domestic maid do not want their daughter to become the same. They want to educate their girls. Some of them do think about higher education. However they are very much concerned about the increased cost of education. Most of the mothers agreed that girls should not be married before age of 19. Boys are free to make their own future. If they want to continue study mothers will be supporting them. Most of the young mothers want their boys to become technician or mechanics.

RSBY A Government of India Scheme (Ministry of Labour & Employment) have been evolved to extend the health protection to domestic workers, which includes health and maternity benefits, death & disability benefits. This task force defines "Domestic Workers" means a person who is employed for remuneration whether in cash or kind, in any household through any agency or directory, either on a temporary basis or permanent, part time or full time to do the household work but not include any number of the family of an employer.

## The Challenge Ahead

The biggest problem faced by the domestic workers across the country is their non-recognition as workers. The domestic workforce is excluded from labor laws that look after important employment-related issues such as conditions of work, wages social security provident funds, old age pensions and maternity leave. Thus it is important to emphasize that women domestic worker require adequate security and protection to be self reliant.

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**Annexure 1 –  
Tables**

**Table -1: Background Characteristics of Domestic Workers**

Age	less than 18	18 – 34	35 – 59	60 +		Total
freq. & %	2	35	48	11		100
Education	Not literate	Literate without formal schooling	Literate with formal schooling	No. res.		Total
freq. & %	47	12	38	3		
Education	primary	middle	Secondary	HSC	other	total
freq. & %	10	7	5	2		
Marital status	unmarried	married	Widow/ Divorced/ separated	No res		Total
freq. & %	15	65	20			
Type of family	Nuclear	joint	No Resp			Total
freq. & %	18	75				
Family size	0 – 4	4 – 8	8 +	No res		Total
freq. & %	8	15	75	2		
Number of children	0 – 2	2 - 4	4 – 6	> 6		total
freq. & %	12	54	28	6		
Religion	Hindu	Muslims	Buddha	Other		total
freq. & %	53	30	9			
Social categories	SC	ST	OBC	Others	Don't know	total
freq. & %	9	8	27	26	20	

Source: Primary data

**Table 2: Employment characteristics**

No of houses covered	1	2	3	4	5
freq. & %	6	22	37	30	5
Nature of job	Utensil/floor cleaning	Cloth washing	cooking	Child care	Old aged care/other
freq. & %	85	80	39	4	10
No of working hrs	< 2	2-4	4-6	6-8	>8
freq. & %	1	22	38	33	6
Monthly income	< 1000	1000-2000	2000-3000	3000-4000	> 4000
freq. & %	6	15	37	30	12

Source: Primary data

**Table – 3: Challenges Faced at Workplace by Domestic Workers**

Responses in %	Yes	No
Working on holidays	83	17
Enjoy fixed weekly holidays	11	89
Doing extra work very often	13	87
Getting overtime payment	8	92
Getting eatable at the workplace	25	75
Suspected of theft by employer	3	97
Faced sexual harassment	2	98
Faced mental harassment	7	93
Faced physical harassment	1	99
Have written contract with employer	1	99
Getting any notice period before termination of job	2	98
Satisfaction with salary	20	80

Source: Primary data

Annexure II –Figures

Figure 1 - Background Characteristics of Domestic Workers

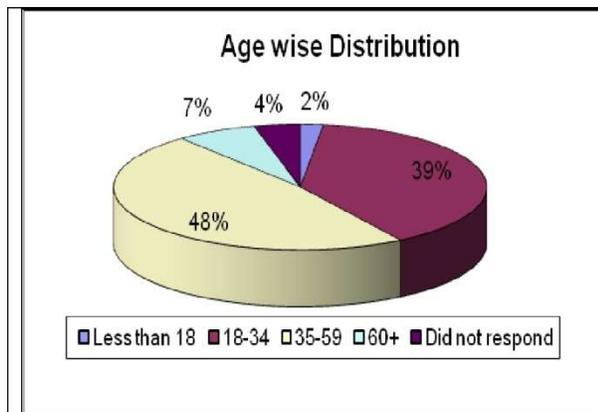


Figure 1.1

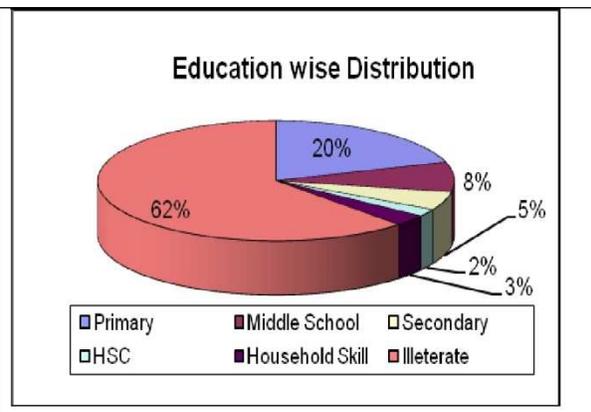


Figure 1.2

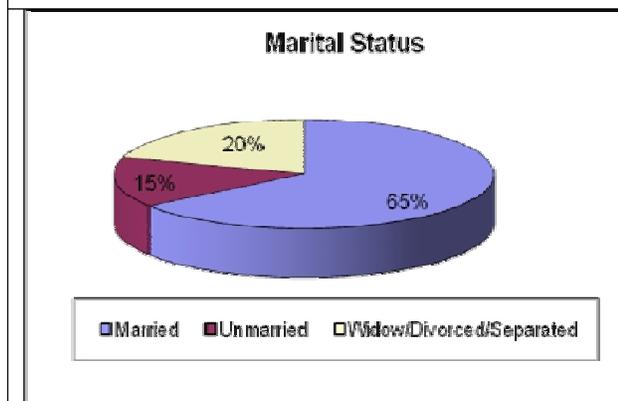


Figure 1.3

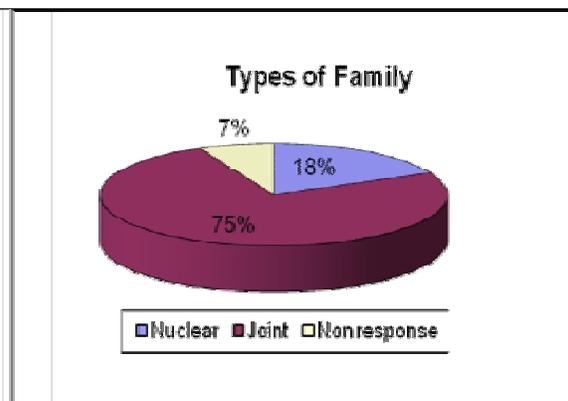


Figure 1.4

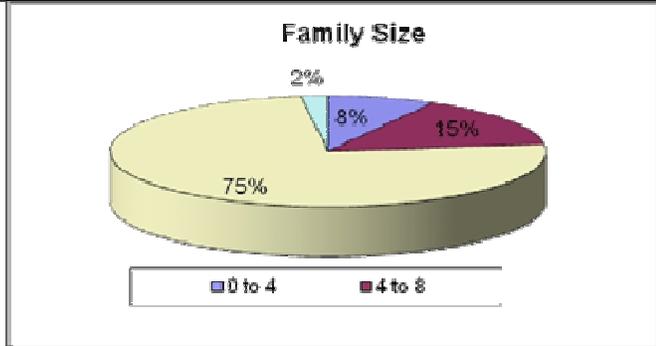


Figure 1.5

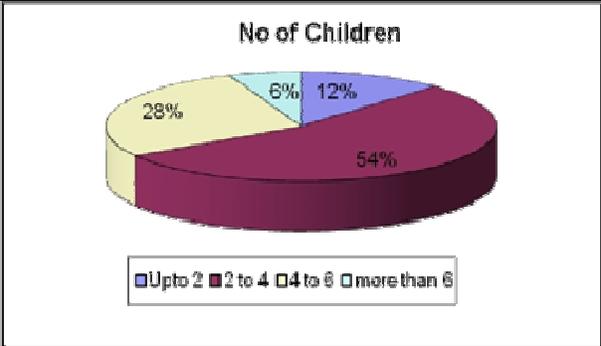


Figure 1.6

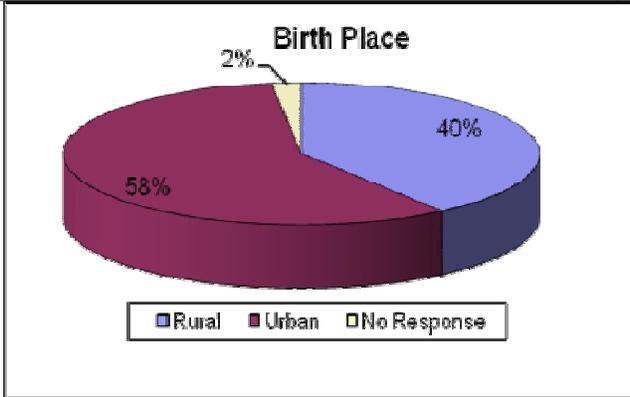


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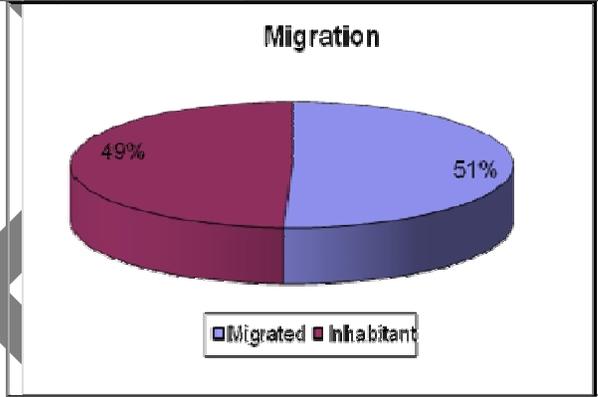


Figure 1.7

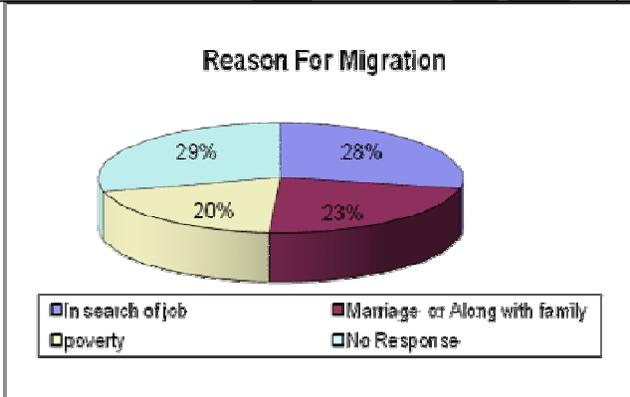


Figure 1.8

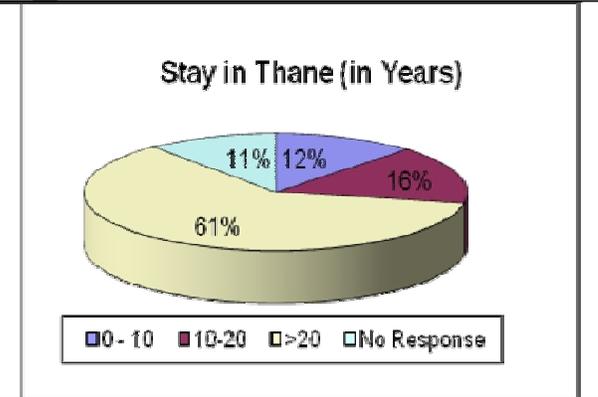


Figure 1.9